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The United States has picked Nepal as one of the beneficiaries among 20 developing countries for President Barak Obama's \$3.5 b Feed the Future Initiative, which aims to reduce hunger and poverty.

USAID Mission Director Dr Kevin Rushing communicated the decision when he met with Agriculture Secretary Nathu Prasad Chaudhary and National Planning Commission Vice Chairman Dr Jagadish Chandra Pokharel.

The US government has named food security as a major global priority, according to a US embassy press release.

"The United States is working closely with the Government of Nepal and the other donors to be sure we can meet President Obama's objectives to reduce chronic hunger and poverty in Nepal," Rushing said.

Although more than 80 per cent of Nepal's population works in the agriculture sector, production of staple crops like wheat and barley have steadily declined. Sixty-six per cent of Nepali households report food shortages and nearly half the number of children under five are undernourished.

"One billion people worldwide are hungry," noted USAID Administrator Dr Rajiv Shah when announcing the selections in Washington DC "Each year, inadequate nutrition contributes to 3.5 million deaths among children under five. Undernutrition robs the developing world of critical human capital and capacity, and undermines other development investments in health, education, and economic growth.

It also perpetuates the cycle of poverty and hunger by leading to poor health, lower levels of educational attainment, and reduced productivity and lifetime earnings." Nepal demonstrates

potential for rapid and sustainable agriculture-led growth, as well as opportunities for regional coordination through trade and other mechanisms, the release states. Feed the Future will tackle the root causes of global hunger by substantially increasing agricultural productivity to meet the demand for food, supporting and facilitating access to strong markets, providing employment opportunities, and increasing incomes so the poor can purchase food and reduce undernutrition through development and diplomatic efforts, the statement added.

Partners in Nepal will include a variety of actors from national and local government agencies, civil society organisations, and the private sector.

The 20 Feed the Future focus countries are: Nepal, Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Tajikistan in Asia; Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia in Africa; and Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, and Nicaragua in Latin America.